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Aruba's ONLY English newspaper

Hugs, at last: Nursing homes easing rules on visitors

By PHILIP MARCELO, PATTY NIEBERG,
and KIMBERLEE KRUESI

Associated Press/Report for America

An 88-year-old woman in Ohio broke down in tears as her son hugged her for the first time in a year. Nursing home residents and staff in California sang "Over the Rainbow" as they resumed group activities and allowed visitors back in. A 5-year-old dove into the lap of her 94-year-old great-great-aunt for a long embrace in Rhode Island.

Nursing homes, assisted living facilities and other kinds of elderly residences battered by COVID-19 are easing restrictions and opening their doors for the first time since the start of the pandemic, leading to joyous reunions around the country after a painful year of isolation, Zoom calls and greetings through windows.

The vaccination drive, improved conditions inside nursing homes, and relaxed federal guidelines have paved the way for the reunions.

There have been welcome-back parties, birthday celebrations, coffee hours on the patio and more in recent days, giving older Americans and their families a glimpse into what life may look like in a post-vaccine world.

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Mary Claire Lane, 86, left, a resident at Hellenic Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, in Canton, Mass., shares a hug with her daughter Anne Darling, of Attleboro, Mass., right, during a visit, Thursday, March 18, 2021, at the nursing home, in Canton.

Associated Press

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Hugs, at last: Nursing homes easing rules on visitors



Eileen Quinn, 98, right, a resident at New Pond Village retirement community, in Walpole, Mass., greets her great-granddaughter Maeve Whitcomb, 6, of Norwood, Mass., left, Sunday, March 21, 2021, at the retirement community, in Walpole.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

"This is the beginning of the very best to come, hopefully, for all of us," said Gloria Winston, a 94-year-old

retirement community resident in Providence, Rhode Island. "The world is going in the right direction. We need the nourishment of each other."

Long-suffering families say the reopenings are well overdue. Most elderly care residents and many staffers have been fully inoculated for weeks, since they were among the first vaccinated in the nationwide rollout. Roughly 1.4 million residents and 1 million staffers at long-term care facilities are fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. COVID-19 cases and deaths in the facilities have also plummeted, from a peak of more than 30,000 cases and 7,000 deaths among residents in one week in December to fewer than 1,300 cases and 500 deaths in all of last week, according to the CDC. (Overall in the U.S., the death toll has topped

540,000. Deaths per day have plummeted to an average of 1,000, down from an all-time high of over 3,400 in mid-January and the lowest level since early November. New cases are running at a still-troubling average of about 54,000 per day, plunging from a quarter-million per day in early January.)

Federal regulators, in recognition of the improving situation, recommended earlier this month that long-term care facilities allow indoor visits at all times.

COVID-19 took a frightening toll in nursing homes and other such institutions. Long-term care residents accounted for more than 130,000 deaths and more than 640,000 cases during the pandemic, according to government data. Staff members accounted for an additional 1,600 deaths and more than 550,000 cases.

In Rhode Island, the first visitors Winston welcomed into the Laurelmead Cooperative since the outbreak started were her great-niece and her 5-year-old great-great-niece.

The three shared a flurry of hugs last week before Cordelia Cappelano, Winston's great-great-niece, retreated, shyly burying her head in her mother's body. "I think I've had better hugs in my day," Winston teased. "It's as if we're not family anymore."

But after nearly two hours playing and catching up, Cordelia warmed up. She dove into Winston's lap for one last hug before it was time to go.

"To be able to be this close and have Cordelia melt around her has just been wonderful," said Wensday Greenbaum, Winston's great-niece. "It's just a release of all that anxiety and

sadness that comes with being isolated. It's been a difficult year, and this is one step closer to normalcy."

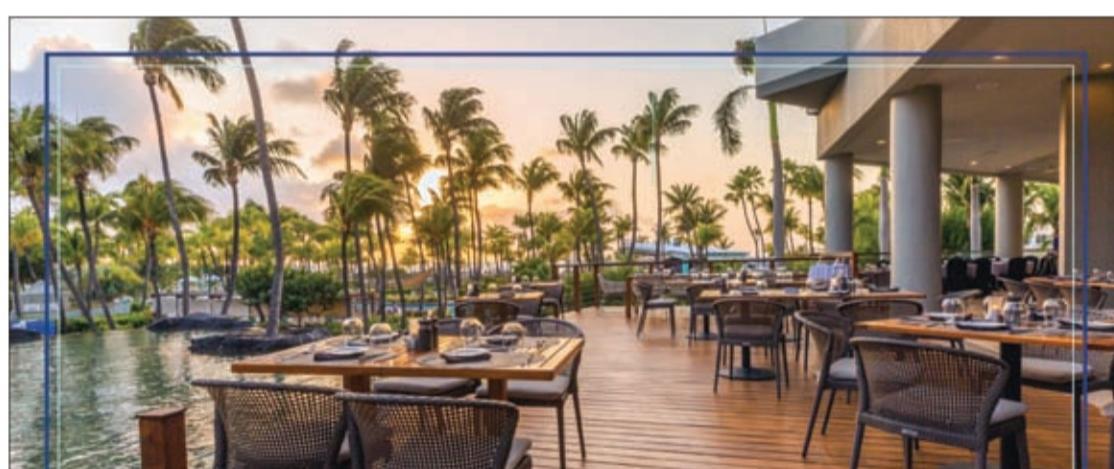
In California last week, Celia Olson sat on the patio with her 92-year-old mother, Connie, at the Chaparral House in Berkeley. It was their second time meeting since visits recently resumed at the nursing home.

"This is really nice," Connie Olson said as her daughter placed a blanket over her. Over the past year, Celia Olson, a 65-year-old veterinarian, was able to see her mother only through a window or via Skype. Now both are vaccinated.

"It's been a year of everybody just being traumatized and trying to understand how to navigate through the coronavirus situation," Celia Olson said. In Cincinnati last week, Bernie Brungs donned goggles and an N-95 mask to hug his 88-year-old mother, Rose, during a special "compassionate care" visit.

Brungs recalled how his mother — who is paralyzed from the waist down and spends most of her time alone — cried and told him how much she missed him during their 15 minutes together. He promised her he would stay longer and play her favorite game — Yahtzee — when indoor visits at Ohio nursing homes officially begin on Tuesday.

"It was wonderful," Brungs said. "The hug I got from her, it was just unimaginable how much it made me feel." In Tennessee, Brandon Johnson was able to wrap his arms around his great-grandmother, Phyllis, on her 89th birthday earlier this month. Johnson said it was a joyful moment he had been praying for after a year of waving to his great-grandmother through windows. □



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Nevada announces \$45M settlement with McKinsey over opioids

By MICHELLE L. PRICE

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Nevada has struck a \$45 million settlement deal with McKinsey & Company for the global consulting firm's role in advising opioid makers how to sell more prescription painkillers amid a national overdose crisis.

The western state reached the deal after sitting out a multi-state settlement with McKinsey announced in February. The hard bargaining has allowed Nevada to win a settlement that's three and a half times larger than the average settlement with other states. "Nevada needed and deserved more than what was being made available to us in the multi-state settlement," state

Attorney General Aaron Ford said Monday. Ford, a Democrat, said that had Nevada stayed in the multi-state deal, it would have received \$7 million, which he called "woefully insufficient." The \$45 million will be paid in two installments of \$23 million in 45 days and \$22 million in 120 days.

McKinsey said the deal reached with Nevada is "consistent with the commitment we made in February to be part of the



This Feb. 19, 2013, file photo shows OxyContin pills arranged for a photo at a pharmacy in Montpelier, Vt.

solution to the opioid epidemic," and it "believes its past work was lawful." The company said the settlement agreement does not contain any admission of wrongdoing or liability. The New York-based company in February settled for \$573 million with 47 states, the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories. It also at the time announced separate settlements with Washington state for \$13.5 million and West Virginia for

\$10 million.

"We deeply regret that we did not adequately acknowledge the tragic consequences of the epidemic unfolding in our communities," McKinsey Global Managing Partner Kevin Sneader said at the time. Opioids, which include prescription drugs like OxyContin and illegal substances such as heroin and illicit fentanyl, have been tied to more than 470,000 deaths in the U.S. over the past two

decades.

McKinsey's role came into the spotlight in recent months when OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma LP sought to settle claims against it in bankruptcy court. The Nevada Attorney General's Office said in legal documents that McKinsey worked with Purdue from 2004 to 2019 to boost sales even as the resulting opioid epidemic emerged. The consulting firm helped create a plan for Purdue to

Associated Press

"turbocharge" sales of OxyContin and other opioids, according to the office, and focused on doctors prescribing high numbers of the drug and encouraged them to prescribe patients more potent doses.

Nevada, with a population of more than 3 million, has been among the hardest-hit states by the crisis. By 2016, it had enough opioid prescriptions for 87 out of 100 residents while overdoses exceeded the national average, according to Ford's office.

Money from the settlement will be used to address the impacts of the opioid epidemic, Ford said, but the specifics would be hammered out by the governor, state lawmakers and other officials.

The state separately is pursuing a wide-ranging lawsuit against Purdue along with the company's former president, his family, other drugmakers, distributors and pharmacies.

The civil lawsuit accuses more than 40 defendants of violating state laws about deceptive trade practices, false claims, racketeering, negligence and public nuisance. Ford said a trial date has been tentatively scheduled for 2022. □

Court could reimpose Boston Marathon bomber's death sentence

By MARK SHERMAN

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court said Monday it will consider reinstating the death sentence for Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, presenting President Joe Biden with an early test of his opposition to capital punishment. The justices agreed to hear an appeal filed by the Trump administration, which carried out executions of 13 federal inmates in its final six months in office, including three in the last week of President Donald Trump's term.

The case won't be heard until the fall, and it's unclear how the new administration will approach Tsarnaev's case. The initial prosecution and decision

to seek a death sentence was made by the Obama administration, in which Biden served as vice president. Biden has pledged to seek an end to the federal death penalty, but he has said nothing about how he plans to do so.

In just over two months in office, the new administration has reversed its predecessor's position in several high court cases. But the Justice Department has not notified the court of any change in its position in Tsarnaev's case.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki did not say how Biden or his administration would approach the case at the Supreme Court. "He has grave concerns about whether capital punishment as currently

implemented is consistent with the values that are fundamental to our sense of justice and fairness. He has also expressed his horror at the events of that day and Tsarnaev's actions," Psaki told reporters.

In late July, the federal appeals court in Boston threw out Tsarnaev's sentence because, it said, the judge at his trial did not do enough to ensure the jury would not be biased against him.

The Justice Department had moved quickly to appeal, asking the justices to hear and decide the case by the end of the court's current term, in early summer. Then-Attorney General William Barr said last year, "We will do whatever's necessary."



This file photo released April 19, 2013, by the Federal Bureau of Investigation shows Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, convicted for carrying out the April 15, 2013, Boston Marathon bombing attack that killed three people and injured more than 260.

Associated Press

is on April 15, 2013. But they argued that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev is less culpable than his brother, who they said was the mastermind behind the attack. □

Army revamps fitness exam, kicks out leg tuck test many fail

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Army is kicking out the leg tuck.

On Monday, it ended its requirement that soldiers do at least one leg tuck — where they hang from a bar and pull their knees up near their shoulders — as part of the new physical fitness test, as it became clear that many troops — particularly women — were unable to do it. Now, soldiers will have the option of choosing another exercise called the plank, that also shows core strength.

That new option is just one of the changes Army leaders are making in their struggle to create a fitness test that is gender and age neutral, but that also doesn't end up disadvantaging female or older soldiers who simply aren't as strong as their younger male counterparts.

In a sweeping nod to gender differences, Army leaders said Monday they are also going to create a new tiered system that will mask some of the fitness score differences between men and women when it comes to promotions or other job selections.

Under that system, all soldiers will take the fitness test, which includes six different exercise events. The



In this Jan. 8, 2019, file photo, U.S. Army troops in training to become instructors participate in the new Army combat fitness test at the 108th Air Defense Artillery Brigade compound at Fort Bragg, N.C.

minimum score for passing is 60 points on each event, for a total of 360, and the maximum is 100 points for each event, for a total of 600. Soldiers will be assigned a ranking based on how they did compared to others of the same gender. For example, if they score in the top 1% of their gender, they are in the platinum category, or if they are in the top 10% of their gender, they are in the gold group. That ranking category would then show up on internal reports for promotions or other competi-

tive assignments where a higher physical fitness score could be a deciding factor. The new tiered system, said Maj. Gen. Lonnie Hibbard, "fosters and recognizes above-average physical performance, something that's inherent to the Army culture. And second, it accounts for the recognized physiological differences between men and women, and it removes the direct competition between males and females within the service."

For years, Army leaders have been wrestling with

how to change the physical fitness test to better reflect combat requirements and improve the overall fitness of the force. After much study, they jettisoned the longtime test of sit-ups, pushups and a 2-mile run, and developed a more grueling fitness exam that adds dead lifts, power throws, a sled drag and other exercises designed to make soldiers more fit and ready for combat.

As they started to roll out the new test, they knew that adjustments would have to be made. And it

quickly became clear that the leg tuck was a problem. The leg tuck, said Hibbard, was the "number one failed event for both men and women," as well as for older soldiers.

"As you look at those service members who have been in the Army, especially fifteen, twenty years and have never been asked to build the upper body strength necessary to do a pull up or do a leg tuck, it gets significantly harder as they get older to build that strength," said Hibbard, commander of the Army's Center for Initial Military Training. Army Sgt. Maj. Michael Grinston acknowledged that the data showed that female soldiers were particularly struggling with the exercise.

So, the Army agreed to offer an alternative. Now soldiers will be able to choose to hold a plank position for about two minutes, which also requires core strength. He added that the new test is more gender- and age-neutral than the old test of situps, pushups and the run. On that test, soldiers got graded differently on the three exercises based on their age and gender. For example, older soldiers didn't have to do the run as quickly as younger soldiers did to get the same score. □

Associated Press

USS Constitution honors 1st female chief petty officer



This 1917 photo released by the U.S. Navy shows the Navy's first female Chief Petty Officer Loretta Perfectus Walsh, who enlisted in 1917.

Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — The U.S.S. Constitution named one of its cannons in honor of

the first woman to serve as a chief petty officer in the Navy.

The 24-pound long gun was named Perfectus after Loretta Perfectus Walsh during a ceremony in Boston on Sunday marking Women's History Month, the Navy said in a statement. Walsh was sworn in as the Navy's first chief petty officer on March 21, 1917. "Loretta Perfectus Walsh has made it possible for all women to serve in the military," Command Senior Chief Angela Collins said. "I get to be here because of the women who have gone before me, and I get the honor to serve with amazing women every single day."

Four of the warship's female crew members gave

a presentation on the significance of Walsh's service. "To talk about Loretta Perfectus Walsh's life holds great meaning for me and everyone around us," Seaman Katrina Mastrolia said. "It gives me hope and determination to face the boundaries that I have in my life today."

The U.S.S. Constitution, also known as Old Ironsides, is the world's oldest commissioned warship afloat, and played a crucial role in the Barbary Wars and the War of 1812, actively defending sea lanes from 1797 until 1855. The ship was undefeated in battle and destroyed or captured 33 enemy vessels. It earned its

nickname during the War of 1812 when British cannonballs were seen bouncing off its wooden hull. Early sailors frequently named the guns on their ships.

And although there are no records for the original names of the U.S.S. Constitution's guns, some have been given names based on records from her sister ships. These include Brother Jonathan, True Blue, Yankee Protection, Putnam, Raging Eagle, Viper, General Warren, Mad Anthony, America, Washington, Liberty for Ever, Defiance, and Liberty or Death.

The U.S.S. Constitution's modern cannons are replicas dating to 1920. □

E.U., U.S., U.K., Canada target China officials over Uyghur abuses

By LORNE COOK

Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union, Britain, Canada and the United States on Monday launched coordinated sanctions against officials in China over human rights abuses in the far western Xinjiang region, provoking swift retaliation from Beijing.

The EU targeted four senior officials in Xinjiang. The sanctions involve a freeze on the officials' assets and a ban on them traveling in the bloc. European citizens and companies are not permitted to provide them with financial assistance.

The 27-nation bloc also froze the assets of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps Public Security Bureau, which it describes as a "state-owned economic and paramilitary organization" that runs Xinjiang and controls its economy.

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said the measures were part of "intensive diplomacy" by the U.K., the United States, Canada and the 27-nation EU to force action amid mounting evidence about serious rights abuses against the Uyghur Muslim people.

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said in a statement that "a united trans-



European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell speaks to the media prior to a meeting of the European Foreign Affairs Ministers, at the European Council headquarters in Brussels, Monday, March 22, 2021.

Associated Press

atlantic response sends a strong signal to those who violate or abuse international human rights, and we will take further actions in coordination with like-minded partners."

"We will continue to stand with our allies around the world in calling for an immediate end to the PRC's crimes and for justice for the many victims," Blinken said.

China responded immediately to the EU's move, slapping sanctions on 10 European individuals and

four institutions that it said had damaged China's interests and "maliciously spread lies and disinformation."

Initially, China denied the existence of camps for detaining Uyghurs in Xinjiang but has since described them as centers to provide job training and to reeducate those exposed to radical jihadi thinking. Officials deny all charges of human rights abuses there.

Xinjiang had been a hotbed of anti-government violence, but Beijing claims

its massive security crackdown brought peace in recent years.

China's Foreign Ministry denounced the EU sanctions as "based on nothing but lies and disinformation" as it issued its own retaliatory measures.

The ministry announced sanctions against 10 individuals and four institutions, saying that they and their family members would be barred from entering mainland China, Hong Kong or Macao and cut off from financial dealings with those

areas.

Among those targeted was Adrian Zenz, a U.S.-based German scholar who has publicized abuses against minority groups in China's regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. China has said companies and individuals have petitioned to sue Zenz, but it wasn't clear who the plaintiffs were or how they would pursue legal action across borders. Others targeted for sanctions include five members of the European Parliament: Reinhard Butikofer, Michael Gahler, Raphael Glucksman, Ilhan Kyuchyuk and Miriam Lexmann.

The ministry did not say what measures would be taken against the organizations. They were listed as the Political and Security Committee of the Council of the European Union, where the 27 national envoys decide foreign and security policy; the EU Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights; the German-based Mercator Institute for China Studies; and the Alliance of Democracies Foundation in Denmark.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who chaired the meeting of foreign ministers, expressed dismay at China's reaction and said the EU's sanctions respect the "highest standards of rule of law." □

Fire guts hundreds of shelters in Rohingya refugee camp

COX'S BAZAR, Bangladesh

(AP) — A devastating fire raced through a sprawling Rohingya refugee camp in southern Bangladesh on Monday, destroying hundreds of shelters and leav-

ing thousands homeless, officials and witnesses said. The fire at Balukhali camp in Cox's Bazar district broke out in the late afternoon and spread quickly through at least four blocks,

said Mohammad Shamsud Douza, additional commissioner of the government's Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commission. He said at least four units of firefighters were struggling to control the blaze due to its rapid spread.

Louise Donovan, a spokeswoman for the U.N. refugee agency, said in an email that fire services, rescue and response teams and volunteers were at the scene.

"So far the fire has affected shelters, health centers, distribution points and other facilities. Volunteers are supporting those affected," she said.

No casualties were immediately reported, but deaths and injuries were feared. No details on the missing could be confirmed. Two Rohingya refugees told The Associated Press at the scene that the fire had spread very quickly and continued to rage into the night Monday. Several videos posted on social media showed clouds of smoke billowing from the camp.

Bangladesh has sheltered more than a million Rohingya Muslims, the vast majority having fled Myanmar in 2017 in a major crackdown by Myanmar's military. The U.N. has said the crack-

down had a genocidal intent, a charge Myanmar rejects.

Bangladesh has hosted the refugees in crowded refugee camps and is eager to begin sending them back to Buddhist-majority Myanmar. Several attempts at repatriation under a joint agreement failed because the Rohingya refused to go, fearing more violence in a country that denies them basic rights including citizenship.

In January, another fire destroyed hundreds of shanty-like homes in the camp, leaving thousands without shelter. □



Smoke rises following a fire at the Rohingya refugee camp in Balukhali, southern Bangladesh, Monday, March 22, 2021.

Associated Press

U.N. official: Airstrikes on NW Syria border area worrying

BEIRUT (AP) — Airstrikes in northwest Syria near the Turkish border that killed a person and set afire trucks used to distribute aid targeted areas considered the safest in the rebel-held region, a top U.N. official said Monday.

The strikes on several locations a day earlier angered Turkey, prompting it to place its troops on high alert. Turkey's Defense Ministry said it asked Russia to secure an immediate halt to the attacks.

Mark Cutts, U.N. deputy regional humanitarian coordinator for the Syria crisis, called the attacks "extremely worrying" because they endangered the lives of the area's most vulnerable population.

The U.S. condemned the attacks and called for a nationwide cease-fire. In a statement Monday, it said the strikes near the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey had put access to much needed assistance at risk.

The area along the border with Turkey in rebel-held northwestern Syria had been considered one of the safest spots in the conflict-stricken region, and had attracted aid groups who located their offices and warehouses there.

The rebel-held enclave divided between Idlib and Aleppo provinces is home



Damage from shelling is seen in hospital in Atareb, a town in rural western Aleppo, Syria, Sunday, March 22, 2021.

Associated Press

to more than 2.7 million displaced people, mostly living in camps and temporary shelters, many having escaped repeated rounds of military offensives and fighting.

"Many of the camps are in that area, about a million people in camps around that area. They are highly vulnerable when airstrikes and shelling happen," Cutts told The Associated Press. "It is also the area where many of the humanitarian organizations have offices and warehouses. They put their warehouses and offices there thinking

that was the safest part of Idlib. So when that starts coming under attack that is extremely worrying."

Turkey and Russia support rival parties in Syria's 10-year conflict. The countries reached a cease-fire deal last March that stopped a Russian-backed government offensive on Idlib, in the last major rebel stronghold in war-torn Syria.

Opposition activists claimed that Russian warplanes carried out the attacks near the Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey late Sunday, hours after government artillery

shells hit a major hospital in Atareb, another rebel-controlled town. Six patients, including a 10-year-old child, were killed. Medical staff were wounded, forcing the facility to shut its doors.

The Bab al-Hawa border crossing is the main point from which international aid is brought to rebel-held parts of northwest Syria.

The crossing "remains the only UN-authorized humanitarian border crossing in Syria and remains the most efficient and effective way to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance" every month to residents of

the area, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said. Cutts called the attack on the hospital "really horrific," adding that the same facility came under attack years before, forcing it to go underground to continue to operate.

Idlib-based journalist Salwa Abdul-Rahman said one of the strikes hit an area near the town of Sarmada, setting afire trucks used by aid workers to distribute assistance.

"The targeted locations were civilian with no military presence," she said. One person was killed in the strikes, according to the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, and the opposition's Syrian Civil Defense, also known as White Helmets.

The civil defense said the strikes also targeted a cement factory.

An AP video from the area showed about a dozen trucks on fire as civil defense members sprayed them with water.

Turkey's Defense Ministry blamed Syrian government forces for the attack, saying it left several people wounded.

Cutts said the year-old cease-fire has held in some parts but not everywhere, saying that shelling in some areas has happened every day. □

Pollard defends spying on U.S. for Israel in rare interview



In this Nov. 20, 2015 file photo, convicted spy Jonathan Pollard leaves a federal courthouse in New York.

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Jonathan Pollard, an American who served a 30-year sentence for spying for Israel,

defends his actions in his first interview since arriving in Israel late last year. He says America had "stabbed Is-

rael in the back" by withholding intelligence from its ally. In excerpts from the interview with the Israel Hayom daily published Monday, Pollard describes his happiness at being a free man in Israel while expressing regret that he was not able to father children because of his incarceration.

Pollard, now 66, sold military secrets to Israel while working as a civilian intelligence analyst for the U.S. Navy in the 1980s. He was arrested in 1985 after trying unsuccessfully to gain asylum at the Israeli Embassy in Washington and pleaded guilty. The espionage affair embarrassed Israel and tar-

nished its relations with the United States for years.

Pollard was given a life sentence. U.S. defense and intelligence officials said his spying caused great damage and strenuously argued against his release. But after serving 30 years in federal prison, he was released in 2015 and placed on a five-year parole period. Pollard arrived in Israel to a hero's welcome in December.

He told Israel Hayom that at the time of his spying the U.S. government was keeping intelligence from Israel and lying to it, claiming he witnessed it himself at meetings. "I know I crossed

a line, but I had no choice," he told the newspaper, adding that the threats to Israel were "serious."

Pollard said he helped his Israeli handler escape by alerting his wife, Anne, to his arrest in a phone call he was granted by the FBI. He used the phrase "water the cactus," which the couple had agreed on as the code words for saying he had been caught and she should leave town.

She was later arrested, but his handler, Aviam Sella, left the country. The Pollards later divorced. All the same, he dismissed the repeated requests for selfies as "nonsense." □

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U.S. officials to hold talks in Mexico on migration

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mex-

ico announced Monday that several top U.S. advisers on border and immigration issues will meet with Mexican officials on Tuesday to discuss migration and development in Central America.

The talks come as a surge of migrants has hit the U.S. southern border. The trip to Mexico will include Roberta Jacobson, the White House's lead adviser on the border, and Juan González, the National Security Council's senior director for the Western Hemisphere.

The White House said Jacobson, a former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, will go there Monday "to engage with Mexican government officials to develop an effective and humane plan of action to manage migration."

Roberto Velasco, Mexico's director for North American affairs, said the talks will focus on the two countries "joint efforts for secure, safe and regulated migration," and plans to provide economic development in southern Mexico and Central America so people won't come under pressure to migrate.

The White House said Gonzalez will then go on to Guatemala, to "meet with Guatemalan government officials, as well as representatives from civil society and non-government organizations to address root causes of migration in the region and build a more hopeful future in the region."

Also among the U.S. officials is Ricardo Zúñiga, who was named Monday as Special Envoy for the Northern Triangle, which includes El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras — three of the countries sending the most migrants to the United

States.

The State Department said Zuñiga will "coordinate closely with the National Security Council staff on the administration's comprehensive efforts to stem irregular migration to the United States and implement President Biden's multi-year, \$4 billion to address root causes of migration in Central America." Since Biden's inauguration, the U.S. has seen a dramatic spike in the number of people encountered by border officials. There were 18,945 family members and 9,297 unaccompanied children encountered in February — an increase of 168% and 63%, respectively, from the month before, according to the Pew Research Center.

U.S. border patrol officials had encountered more than 29,000 unaccompanied minors since Oct. 1, nearly the same number of youths taken into custody for all of the previous budget year, according to administration officials.

Mexico announced restrictions last week on nonessential travel across its southern border with Guatemala and Belize "to prevent the spread of COVID-19," and sent hundreds of immigration agents and National Guard to the southern border to clamp down on crossings.

Mexico did not explain why the measure was announced now, more than a year after the start of the pandemic, but it came on the same day the U.S. confirmed it will send 2.5 million doses of the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine to Mexico.

Officials say migrant traffickers are encouraging people to make the trip by claiming the U.S. border is open to migrants, while



Mexican immigration agents stop people who crossed the Suchiate River, the natural border between Guatemala and Mexico, to see their identification documents as they enforce limits on all but essential travel near Ciudad Hidalgo, Mexico, Monday, March 22, 2021.

Associated Press

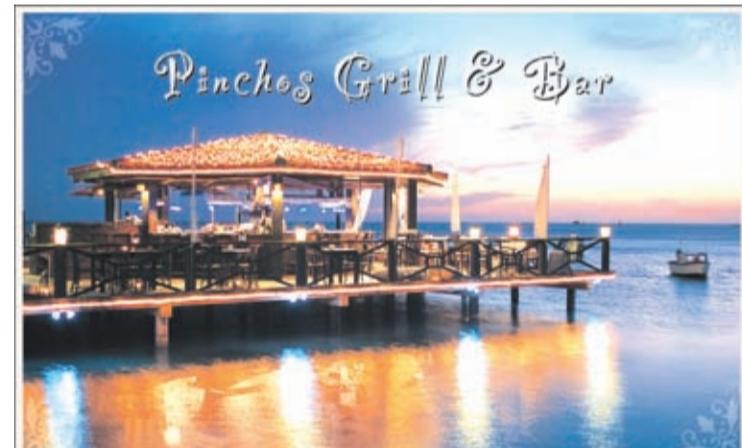
Biden administration officials have stressed that the border is not open.

Mexico has cooperated with U.S. efforts to stem the flow, while stressing that the problem can only be solved by addressing the root problems of poverty and joblessness that lead many to migrate. Mexico has proposed massive investment to promote economic development in those areas. □

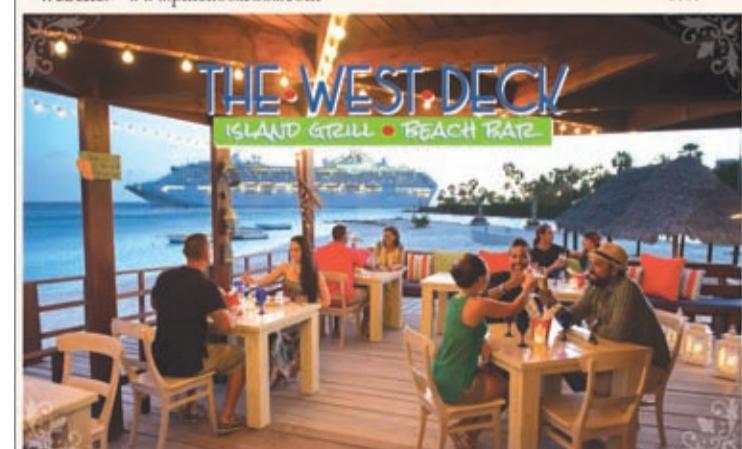
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Organization, Governance and Management (OGM) at the University of Aruba: “Are you into making and implementing policies for a better world? Then OGM is your thing.”

Register coming Thursday during the Virtual Open House!



ORANJESTAD — Luc Alofs is a lecturer for the program of Organization, Governance and Management (OGM) at the University of Aruba. “We are a four-year, accredited Bachelor program on academic level, developed in collaboration with the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. Together with the program Social Work & Development we provide in the need for social workers and policy makers who know our context and who we educate to function in local circumstances.” Both programs have turned out to be very successful. “OGM students are interested in academic sciences, motivated to design and implement new policies.”

“Aruba needs local people knowing the local context to enter into the labor market. OGM students can go in all kind of directions, working at NGO’s but also in the private sector, governments, HR, wherever you need organization, governance and management people can find jobs.”

OGM has a general curriculum followed by both OGM and Social Work & Development, enhancing among others academic reading and writing, Dutch, introduction to methodology and sociology. Although 90% of the program is in English, more language expressions are welcome.

“When it comes to self-improvement one needs to be able to express in their home language,” adds Alofs.

Making guidelines

The lecturer states, “If you come here the first year, we do two things. We look if you fit in the profession and you look if the profession fits you. If you are into making a better world for everybody than you should come to social work, if you are into that by making and implementing policies, OGM is your thing. Both programs are connected by the U.N. social goal development agenda. We work towards inclusion for all in society, sustainability and developing identities with respect to diversity.” In this particular time the world needs more transparency and clarity from governments and Aruba is no exception. Alofs offers, “Social Affairs Departments had no policy in place before, but this transition has and is taking place. Life is not getting easier with this pandemic and we need our own guideline setup.”

We are a multicultural community

When it comes to the time we are living now, Alofs can say the last few months were very heavy on all of them. “As educators we had to adapt our internships without face-to-face interaction, we had to improvise how to do exams, re-organize our classes and our students went through the same. For sure this all had a huge impact and it takes its tolls on all of us, we miss each other. This also shows how much we are connected here.” The ambitious university is growing in popularity among international students too. Students from different cultures feel at ease here because the island’s population is a mix of cultures living side by side in harmony. “We are a small university with a big heart, a community on its own where everybody is welcome to join!” □





University of Aruba

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**University of Aruba offers unique program together with University of Leuven, Belgium:
“SISSTEM is a solution based program for sustainability issues in small island states”**

ORANJESTAD — Eric Mijts is the developer of SISSTEM which means Sustainable Island Solutions through Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, a new program at the University of Aruba. “Students will on the basis of deep understanding of fundamental sciences, chemistry, physics, biology, GO sciences, mathematics and data sciences develop skills in problem solving for sustainability issues in small island states. It is really solution based, not problem focused.” Think of jobs like sustainability officers, data scientists, analysts for central banks or governments, sustainability managers in the building sector and monument care and positions within WEB, Elmar, renewable energy installations and in the field of electric cars.

“You fit this program if you really see the energy and bio-environmental challenges that we are facing but also the science challenges where we make transitions

to a new digital world without having our own data sciences network yet. Creating that expertise is what we stand for,” Mijts explains. “We look for people with an enormous broad background so whether you are into environmental protection or looking for a balance between human and environment or you love data sciences solutions and data minding/network or even building environment and solutions.” The current students find it a challenging program because it is an academic program that confronts you with challenges you did not see or were blind to. “It is quite a right indeed. But our students are full dedicated. We did a project of an energy audit with the Dutch marine barracks and the evaluations of the students were an eye-opener. You see they are understanding what role they could play in society and what actually global footprint is and how to relate this to money, to people and to technologic innovation.” The program shows the value of engaging with stakeholders and also to work as a group. They bring their knowledge

into practice and involve into the Aruban community which is very important.

Why this program?

Mijts: “We noticed a lack of scientific higher education of technology and engineering. One of the big issues we are facing is that we miss a lot of expertise in implementing solutions for the development of our island. Having a program like SISSTEM in place can really help building the critical capacity for successful implementation of sustainability challenges.” Beside of the bachelor program six PhD candidates started past year and five more will begin in the upcoming months. “This means that you create a network within society because every student has to brand out and so the community will talk about us. We are getting attention, my hope is ten years from now we have a continuous flow of 10, 15, 20 people with that expertise as a basic think-tank of the University of Aruba.”

The new walk

During the Covid-19 period students and teachers remained in communication through google meet and zoom all the time. “We did not have a single delay. We were already working with a digital platform and we agreed on it together to complete all and so we did. Colleagues in Europe tell us our student dedication is fantastic,” Mijts says proud. “For the future we have to reinvent the way we are living. We need to change the way we teach. How? Face to face education will turn into blended learning approaches. We need to facilitate digital class rooms for small groups of students and working internationally will be much



easier now. The fundamental role is going to change; Students and teachers need to learn and find gratification and beauty in digital learning and teaching. Teachers need to help students cross that bridge and students will need to be more independent, disciplined and creative.”

For more information about the SISSTEM program: <https://www.ua.aw/sisstem/>

SISSTEM offers a 3-year, 180 EC bachelor program in STEM with specializations in bio-environmental sciences, technology and engineering, and informatics and data sciences; a 1.5-year, 90 EC multidisciplinary master program, PhD projects for sustainable development in small island states and a research and development center. The SISSTEM project is the result of a collaboration between the University of Aruba, KU Leuven and the initial phase is funded by the EU as part of the EDF-11 fund.



Aqua Grill restaurant: The taste of New England with Caribbean flair

ORANJESTAD — One thing is for certain: Chef Scott Scheuerman and his team are famous for getting people hooked, just like the fish on your plate. You will get the taste of home fused with Caribbean while dining in elegance. Scheuerman will tell how Aqua Grill established its name since opening in 2002, and why it reaped accolades from such prestigious travel publications as Fodor's, who says, "This hip restaurant is heaven on earth for seafood lovers, who will find fresh fish galore..." Now is your chance to taste Aqua Grill's NEW seasonal menu and create a lifetime culinary memory.

'A Scheuer thing'

Secretly, we all know that the success of a restaurant begins in the kitchen. That is where the chef creates his magic and for Aqua Grill the culinary team has won an assortment of awards for their continuous delivery of 'haute-cuisine del mar.' Classic seafood is mingled with contemporary ideas resulting in surprising dishes that soon made the restaurant a must-dine, confirmed by established travel media specialists like Fodor's and Frommer's.

American-born Scheuerman, executive chef of Aqua Grill, is thrilled about 'his restaurant'. "We started out as a New England style seafood restaurant, patterned after Boston style. But we quickly blended into some Caribbean, local flair... if you will. We do still offer the traditional New England dishes like whole Maine lobster, northern seafood plates like the salmon, tuna and swordfish. We buy also from the local fisherman to offer Caribbean dishes like snapper and grouper which are number one sellers



in our restaurant being the most prevalent local fishes. Catches like wahoo, mahi mahi and brasil are welcome too, anything that comes out of the water we embrace."

Fresh import from Boston

Aqua Grill flies in their own shipments on a weekly basis mostly from Boston because the price quality balance is the best, says the chef. "We are unique in this. Number one priority is buying fresh, we mean not frozen. Our original concept is New England seafood and we stick to that concept. They have a wonderful assortment of oysters and lobsters as well." Aqua Grill also offers international fusion type of menu items; actually all you wish for is there. A very balanced menu awaits you. "And we have options for meat lovers and vegetarians/vegans too. We, however, do not mix it up too much be-

cause we believe we do not want to lose our identity as a seafood restaurant," Scheuerman adds.

NEW! Sublime seasonal menu

Now is the time to indulge in Aqua Grill's dinner experience. The established restaurant offers a sensational seasonal menu. We present to you a fresh Oyster Bar selection: French Kiss (Prince Edward Island), Irish Point (Prince Edward Island) and Billingsgate Lighthouse (Massachusetts) or West Bay (Massachusetts) and Duxbury (Massachusetts).

After that continue your gastronomic trip to heaven with an appetizer like Tuna Tataki, seasoned yellowfin tuna flash-seared and sliced with ponzo and presented raw with wakame, wasabi and sweet pickled ginger or Grilled Oysters with butter, fennel and leeks.

You haven't reached your destina-

tion yet because the main course options will blow you away: Blackened Brazil, locally caught amberjack fillet blackened and presented with sweet potato, asparagus and served with sweet and spicy red pepper compote or Broiled Lobster Tail, 12 oz Caribbean lobster tail with zucchini-potato roll and jardinière vegetables. In all honesty, how can you resist this? Take a pick out of Aqua Grill's delicious desserts to finally conclude: yes, this beats it all. We will be back for more.

About the place

The glow of Aqua Grill is obvious by entering the restaurant. The eclectic of a modern and a traditional New England fish house style appeal and the open-view kitchen adds to the thrill. It's clear as water; for sublime seafood in Aruba go to the island's premier seafood restaurant: Aqua Grill. This seafood-heaven place is already a statement for years with a consistency in upscale dining and top-shelf service. If you like to savor your seafood, this is your dive in. We promise you will get hooked.□

Aqua Grill

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AQUA GRILL



Fed's Powell: Public should understand risks of Bitcoin

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell said Monday that the U.S. public needs to understand the risks behind Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, even as the central bank itself is studying the potential costs and benefits of a digital dollar. Powell said the Fed prefers to call crypto coins "crypto assets," because their volatility undermines their ability to store value, a basic function of a currency.

"They're highly volatile, see Bitcoin, and therefore not really useful as a store of value," Powell said in remarks to a virtual summit hosted by the Bank for International Settlements. "They're more of an asset for speculation. So they're also not particularly in use as a means of payment.... It's essentially a substitute for gold rather than for the dollar."

Bitcoin has soared nearly ten-fold in value compared with a year ago, hovering around \$57,000 on Monday. That is up from \$5,830 in March 2020. It is often seen as a hedge against inflation, and inflation fears have risen as the Fed has kept its short-term benchmark interest rate pegged near zero for the past year. The Fed is also injecting \$120 billion into the banking system each month by



In this Dec. 1, 2020 file photo, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Jerome Powell appears before the Senate Banking Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Associated Press

purchasing Treasurys and mortgage-backed securities.

While Bitcoin is rarely used in transactions, that could change. Electric car maker Tesla said last month that it was buying \$1.5 billion of Bitcoin and would soon accept Bitcoin payment for its cars.

Powell also said the Fed is researching the potential for a central bank digital currency, though he added that the Fed is not yet near a decision about implementing one.

"We're not in a mode of trying to make a decision at this point," he said. "We

are experimenting with technology."

But Powell added that given the dollar's critical role as the world's leading reserve currency, the Fed has "an obligation to be on the cutting edge" of understanding the costs and benefits of a central bank digital currency, or CBDC. At the same time, Powell said there was no need for the Fed to rush or "be first to market." Many other central banks are exploring CBDCs, including China's, and some observers worry China is ahead of the U.S. Powell said the Fed is conducting research through

an in-house technology lab, and also collaborating with MIT through the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, one of its 12 regional Fed banks.

"The real threshold question for us is, does the public want or need a new digital form of central bank money to complement what is already a highly efficient, reliable and innovative payments oriented system?" Powell asked. There are risks and benefits to digital currencies, the Fed chair said. The benefits include a "more efficient, more inclusive payment system," while the risks in-

volve cyber attacks, money laundering and terrorist financing. There is also the risk that a digital currency could be held by individuals electronically and could therefore bypass banks.

"We don't want to compete with banks for funding," Powell said.

Ultimately, Powell said that Congress would likely need to pass legislation allowing a CBDC before the Fed would create one.

"We would not proceed with this without support from Congress, and I think that would ideally come in the form of an authorizing law," Powell said.

The Fed chair also expressed some concerns about so-called "stablecoins," which are digital currencies that are pegged to the value of government-backed currencies such as the dollar or euro. Facebook's Libra, which it now calls Diem, is an example of a stablecoin. "The potentially fast and wide adoption of a global stablecoin, potentially a global currency governed only by the incentives of a private company, is something that will deserve and will receive the highest level of regulatory expectations," Powell said. "Private stable coins are not going to be an appropriate substitute for a sound monetary system based in central bank money." □

New SBA head plans changes at agency; focus now is COVID-19

By JOYCE M. ROSENBERG
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The new head of the Small Business Administration says she expects to make changes at the agency that she says will enable it to further help small companies devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In an interview with The Associated Press on Friday, two days after she was sworn in, Isabella Casillas Guzman said her immediate focus is implementing the small business provisions in the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus rescue package President Joseph Biden signed into law last week.

The country has lost 400,000 businesses since the start of the pandemic, Guzman said, warning that "many more are at risk." Guzman already knows how the SBA operates, having been a deputy chief of staff at the agency during the Obama administration. "We'll be looking at our overall programs to see a path forward for small businesses," she said. Guzman acknowledged that the SBA's role has changed dramatically as a result of the pandemic; she said the agency has gotten attention it never had in the past. The SBA's lending focus over the past

year has been the PPP, which has approved nearly 8 million loans worth more than \$700 billion. Before the pandemic, the agency's main lending vehicles were its 7(a) and 504 programs that owners turned to for loans to start and build their businesses. Those traditional lending programs may see some changes, Guzman said. The administrator's agenda also includes improving SBA technology to make it more accessible to businesses; she noted that many businesses adopted or upgraded their technology in order to survive the virus outbreak. □



In this Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2021, file photo, Isabella Casillas Guzman attends a Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship hearing to consider her nomination to be Administrator of the Small Business Administration on Capitol Hill, in Washington.

Associated Press

Bill to aid U.S. publishers vs. Google, Facebook rises again

By TALI ARBEL
AP Technology Writer

A congressional effort to bolster U.S. news organizations in negotiations with Big Tech has supporters hoping that third time's the charm.

The bill, the Journalism Competition and Preservation Act, was introduced in March for the third time since 2018. Its odds of passage may have improved in a Democrat-run Congress that's working on overhauling antitrust laws. Australia and other countries have started pushing mechanisms to support news publishers against Facebook and Google, which dominate online advertising. Publishers argue that Big Tech squeezes news organizations out of digital ad revenue and exerts undue control over who can see their journalism.

The bill would offer a four-year antitrust exemption to publishers so they can negotiate as a group with "dominant online platforms." Facebook and Google get the majority of online ad dollars in the U.S. The measure aims to give publishers better leverage with the tech companies, while only allowing coordination that benefits the news industry as a whole, amid a long-running decline in local news.

Rep. David Cicilline, a Rhode Island Democrat



In this Wednesday, March 10, 2021 file photo, Rep. David Cicilline, D-R.I., speaks during the House Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing on the administration foreign policy priorities on Capitol Hill in Washington.

and one of the bill's sponsors, said in prepared remarks for a hearing earlier this month that the legislation would provide news publishers an "even playing field" to negotiate deals with major tech platforms. The news industry is struggling with falling revenues, shrinking newsrooms and failing publications — which Cicilline and others call a threat to democracy — while Google and Facebook rack up billions in profits.

"This bill is a life support measure, not the answer for ensuring the long-term health of the news indus-

try," the congressman said. While the bill has Republican cosponsors in both the House and Senate, some Republicans in the same hearing expressed reservations. Rep. Jim Jordan, an Ohio Republican, said he worried about giving more power to large media companies that would suppress conservatives' opinions. Republicans often assert without evidence that tech companies censor conservatives and right-wing media.

The News Guild, a union

that represents journalists, says the bill would work best with additional provisions to support jobs. It has long objected to media consolidation and criticizes many publishers for impeding unionization and slashing newsroom jobs, particularly at chains owned by hedge funds and private equity firms.

News Guild president Jon Schleuss would like the legislation to require publishers to spend 60% of the revenue won from bargaining to hire more journalists and

Associated Press

also support small papers and fund start-ups in "news deserts," areas where papers have folded, worried that instead it might be spent on things like dividends, stock buybacks and squeezing out higher profit margins.

Microsoft, whose president testified during the hearing, supports the bill. Google and Facebook on Friday declined to comment on the legislation.

In February, however, Facebook took the extraordinary step of banning Australian news from its platform to protest a law that would have required it to negotiate with publishers to compensate them for its use of news content. Facebook lifted the ban once the government agreed to modify the law. Microsoft, meanwhile, has teamed up with European publishers to support measures similar to the Australian law in Europe.

Over the past few years, Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple have all come under increasing scrutiny from Congress and regulators. The Justice Department, Federal Trade Commission and state attorneys general are suing the internet giants for a variety of antitrust violations, some of which are related to the woes of publishers. □

Tool created to aid cleanup from Microsoft hack in broad use



In this Jan. 28, 2020 file photo a Microsoft computer is among items displayed at a Microsoft store in suburban Boston.

Associated Press

been downloaded more than 25,000 times since it was released last week, the White House's National Security Council said Monday.

As a result, the number of vulnerable systems has fallen by 45%, according to an NSC spokesperson.

The one-click Microsoft tool was created to protect against cyberattacks and to scan systems for compromises and fix them. It was developed after a massive hack affecting an estimated tens of thousands of users of servers running Microsoft's Exchange email program. □

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

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3/23

By ERIC TUCKER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A tool designed to help business-

es protect themselves from further compromises after a global hack of Microsoft email server software has

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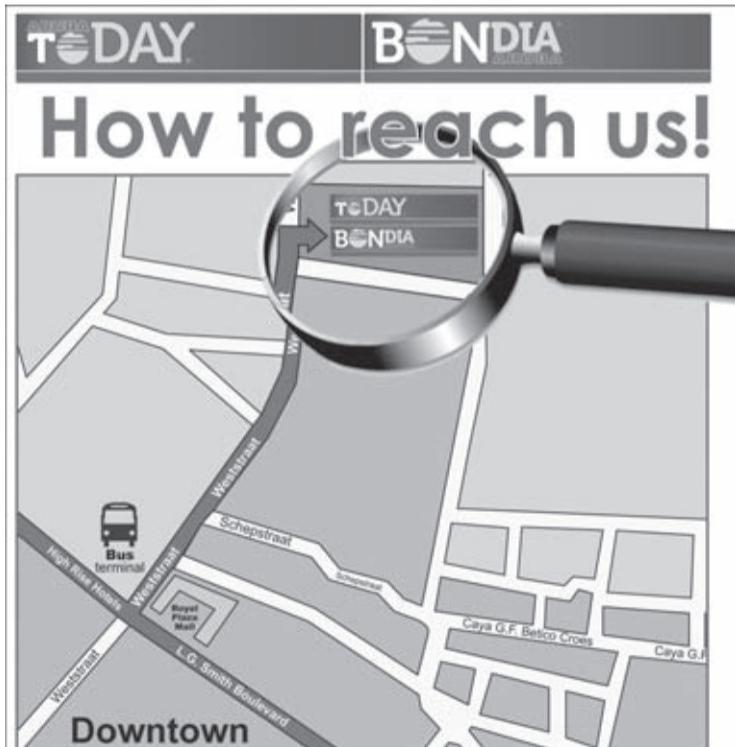
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Comic, Netflix staple Jo Koy talks race, rejection in memoir

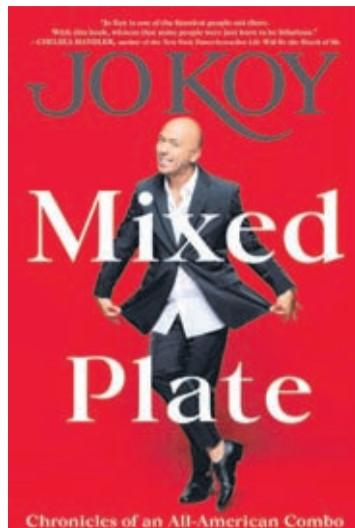
By TERRY TANG
Associated Press

Like many famous comics, Jo Koy had early struggles at comedy clubs. But, unlike them, the half white and half Filipino comedian could only seem to book spots on ethnic theme nights like "Wonton Wednesdays" and "Asian Invasion."

"There's a lot of comics that had to do it. I'm not just saying Asians — Black people, Latinos, anyone that was 'other' had to do these themed shows. And it sucks," Koy recalled recently.

Segregating comics may sound bizarre and offensive in today's world but that underlying racism "baked into" the comedy club circuit was acceptable in the early 2000s, according to Koy. How he went from there to being a Netflix darling and having a movie deal with Steven Spielberg is part of the career journey Koy, 49, tells in his new memoir.

"Mixed Plate: Chronicles of an All-American Combo," out Tuesday, is an ideal companion to Koy's stand-up with its humorous — and at times painful — origin stories behind some of his most popular bits. The book shows how Koy's mixed-race background ultimately shaped his brand of comedy and his determination not to give up on



This cover image released by Dey Street Books shows "Mixed Plate: Chronicles of an All-American Combo," a memoir by comedian Jo Koy.

Associated Press

his childhood dream.

"I'm not trying to pat myself on the back. It was a long road," Koy said. "And when I finally got to this point in my career, I just looked at my manager. I was like, 'Man, I would really like to tell people, you know, this struggle, and how hard it was to really get here.'"

With the help of a writing partner, Koy, born Joseph Glenn Herbert, lays bare how he grappled with his mixed-race identity as a child growing up in Tacoma, Washington. He doesn't shy away from deeply personal topics including an older brother with violent schizophrenia and a father who left when he was only 12 years old. (The book also documents

their reconciliation.)

"I've always been open to just letting people be inside my life," Koy said. "So when I said I was going to write a book, of course I'm going to tell them everything. Or else, you're not going to really know the story of how I got there."

Koy, who's sold out stadium shows, has aspired to make people laugh since age 11. He didn't "speak school" and was never interested in conventional pursuits like college. For him, earning \$5 doing stand-up on an open mic in a coffeehouse was more thrilling. By the 1990s, he followed his mother and stepfather to Las Vegas and started doing comedy contests and small clubs there. In 2001, he decided to make the big move to Los Angeles.

The comedy club circuit wasn't exactly receptive to his bi-racial appearance.

"You come to Hollywood, and they have no idea what they're looking at — as horrible as that sounds," Koy said. "'What's your story? We don't get it. Where do we put you?'"

Koy took whatever gigs at clubs like The Improv and the Laugh Factory — even the ethnic "theme nights." Meanwhile, he juggled as many as three part-time jobs. By 2003, he also had to factor in his newborn son.

In the book, he recounts

performing at the Laugh Factory while a then-unknown Tiffany Haddish would be off to the side watching his son.

"We had that that little bond of ours, you know, that we both had seen struggle," Koy said. "I love Tiffany, that she was she was there during that process. She still is in my life to this day, which is even more amazing."

Seeing his toddler son play with his mother, it hit Koy that family life could be funny fodder. While mimicking his mother's accent and mannerisms is now classic Koy, he initially hesitated for fear of being labeled "the Filipino comic." But he saw that all audiences seemed to find anecdotes involving his mother relatable.

"That's when I knew. I was like, 'Oh, I got something good here. I know how to do it now,'" Koy said.

His Filipino roots shine brightly in the book. Koy may be the first comic with a memoir that's part recipe book. There are instructions on how to make Filipino dishes like lumpia and chicken adobo.

He wants to keep being "an ambassador for Filipino food" and culture.

With three Netflix comedy specials under his belt in the last four years, including one filmed in Manila, Koy said people often think that the streaming service

discovered him. But like other times in his life, he was rejected by them for their 2017 comedy slate.

Determined to give them a reason to say yes, Koy put on his own special. He booked a theater in Seattle and paid for a high-quality crew to film it.

The final product was enough to elicit an offer from Netflix.

Since then, Koy has built a reputation as an in-demand comedian. With plenty of on-screen experience including being a panelist on Chelsea Handler's old E! talk show, "Chelsea Lately," Koy seems one sitcom or film away from the next level of stardom. One of his Netflix specials got Spielberg's attention. The director's production company, Amblin Entertainment, is producing a starring vehicle for Koy, "Easter Sunday." Based on Koy's own experiences, the movie comedy follows a family gathering on the titular holiday.

Even with all these opportunities, Koy's mother sometimes asks him if he'll drop stand-up for a regular job "with benefits."

"I don't think about retiring. I'm gonna die on that stage," Koy said.

"That's kind of hard to explain to an immigrant parent. They don't understand that. But you know what? We're all enjoying this." □

Elton John opens his Oscar night party to all this year



In this Sunday, Feb. 9, 2020, file photo, Elton John appears after performing his nominated song, "(I'm Gonna) Love Me Again," at the Oscars in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

By The Associated Press

Attending Elton John's long-running Oscar-night party has always been one of the hardest tickets to get. Now you can go — if you have \$20.

The Elton John AIDS Foundation is inviting everyone to an hourlong, virtual pre-show Oscar party special hosted by Neil Patrick Harris and with a performance by Dua Lipa.

Tickets for the April 25 event are \$19.99 and are available via Ticketmaster. Proceeds will go to young people at risk and living with HIV all over the world. The foundation is one of the

leading independent AIDS organizations in the world. One of its fundraising highlights is the star-studded Oscar viewing show, with a dinner and an auction. This time, a pre-show will be available to ticket buyers.

The special will be hosted four times in four different time zones and each will accommodate 100,000 viewers, meaning a total of 400,000 ticket buyers are allowed access.

"Now more than ever, we need to ensure that one pandemic does not override another, and we cannot forget the 38 million people living with HIV glob-

ally who need our care, love and support so we hope everyone joins us for this special one of a kind Oscar Pre-Party," John said in a statement. □

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Difficulty Level ★★

SUPER Doit Center
Be Famia Pa Semper!

Weekly SPECIALS



Pineapples



Chicken Drumsticks



Hormel Cooked Ham



M&M Peanut Ice Stick 248gr

*Offer is valid from 19 - 25 Mar 2021 and while supplies last. All prices are in US dollars (\$)

Driving diversity: Hamilton ready to chase 8th F1 title

By JEROME PUGMIRE

AP Auto Racing Writer

PARIS (AP) — If Lewis Hamilton wins an eighth Formula One title, he will stand alone among the sport's greats. And that might be the perfect time to walk away from the track for good.

Hamilton's decision to pen a one-year contract with Mercedes sparked speculation he may call it quits when the sun sets on the F1 season at the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix in December.

Hamilton will be nearly 37 by then and, if he does successfully defend his F1 crown, the British driver will move one ahead of fellow great Michael Schumacher.

Hamilton would have nothing left to prove, with the most titles, wins (95 so far) and pole positions (98) all his.

"Of course, it is the ultimate dream, but I don't think necessarily it will be the deciding factor for if I stay on and keep going," Hamilton said. "I think it is more when I put that helmet on, I still have that smile when I leave the garage. Will that be the case this year? We



In this Sunday, Nov. 29, 2020 file photo, Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton of Britain celebrates after winning the Formula One race in Bahrain International Circuit in Sakhir, Bahrain.

Associated Press

shall see. Will I enjoy it as much? We'll see."

The season starts Sunday in Bahrain after the traditional season-opening GP in Melbourne, Australia was postponed until November because of the coronavirus pandemic.

As brilliant as Hamilton was last year, he ended the season feeling drained after contracting the virus and expending huge energy in the fight against racism, his push for greater diversity in motorsport, and his call for better human rights in some countries where F1 goes.

It all started when Hamilton and most drivers took a knee against racism at the Austrian GP in July, when the delayed 2020 season began. While others appeared to fade in their commitment, Hamilton continued to hammer home the need to fight. Hamilton, who was knighted in year-end royal honors, has the same mindset for the season ahead. "That's my driving force this year. To make sure that we continue to push for accountability, and on top of that hopefully I can deliver

good performances," he said.

F1's 'We Race As One' campaign was among the themes of 2020, he said, "But (more) action is needed this year. We've got to make sure that we continue to have that conversation."

Hamilton said there were positive discussions between drivers at pre-season testing and F1's president Stefano Domenicali, who "has taken the time to sit with us all and be open."

On the track, pre-season did not go well for Mercedes. It gave rivals hope that a dominant series of seven straight drivers' and constructors' championships may at last be under genuine threat.

Red Bull star Max Verstappen picked up where he left off after winning last year's final race in Abu Dhabi in style and appeared very confident in testing.

"I'd say Red Bull are ahead on performance. They are the class act. Are we going to have a close season? I would say so," Mercedes strategy director James Vowles said. "Red Bull are a fierce adversary, they've

got a strong package and clearly came out of the box very, very quick."

Red Bull has a stronger line-up, too, with Sergio Perez replacing Alex Albon and bringing with him nearly 200 GPs and 10 podiums, including a second place in Turkey followed by a superb win at the Sakhir GP last year.

Hamilton is wary of Red Bull's threat, saying "It's going to be a long battle with them."

The early signs are that the 23-year-old Verstappen will add to his 10 GP wins.

"It has definitely been the best pre-season. The car felt nice to drive, which I think is always very positive," Verstappen said, referring to Red Bull's reliability issues last year. "But it doesn't give you any guarantees. We'll find out through the first race weekend where we are."

Valtteri Bottas finished 124 points behind fellow Mercedes driver Hamilton, compared with 87 the season before. The margin of defeat last season was even more emphatic considering there were four fewer races than in 2019. □

3 women top Alpine skiing's World Cup prize money table

GENEVA (AP) — Women were the top three prize money earners on Alpine skiing's World Cup circuit this season, the International Ski Federation said Monday.

Lara Gut-Behrami was the highest prize earner with a total of 485,000 Swiss francs (\$523,000) before taxes, including six race wins that typically each pay 45,000 Swiss francs (\$48,600).

Petra Vlhova, who edged

Gut-Behrami for the women's overall title on Saturday, got 444,000 Swiss francs (\$479,000) after starting in all but two of the 31 women's events.

Mikaela Shiffrin won the most valuable women's race - the night slalom at Flachau, Austria, that paid almost 63,000 Swiss francs (\$68,000) - in her total of almost 411,000 Swiss francs (\$444,000).

Alexis Pinturault was the

men's overall World Cup champion and its highest earner. His 379,000 Swiss francs (\$409,000) prize money included wins in five of the 35 events.

The most valuable World Cup race is the fearsome Hahnenkamm men's downhill at Kitzbühel, Austria, which paid almost 87,500 Swiss francs (\$94,500) to the winner Beat Feuz. A total of 9 million Swiss francs (\$9.7 million) was on



Switzerland's Lara Gut-Behrami, winner of the alpine ski, women's World Cup super G discipline title, celebrates on podium, in Lenzerheide, Switzerland, Thursday, March 18, 2021.

Associated Press

offer in men's and women's events before race

cancellations were taken into account. □

No basement blues: Goodell on hand for draft in Cleveland

By TOM WITHERS

AP Sports Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — Roger Goodell's leaving his man cave for this year's NFL draft. The Commissioner missed welcoming new players last year — and being booed.

"He's excited to get out of the basement," joked league executive Peter O'Reilly.

A year after a three-day stop in Las Vegas was scrapped and one of its signature events had to go virtual because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the league announced Monday initial plans for this year's draft in Cleveland, where thousands of fans will be safely welcomed in a step toward normalcy.

Goodell hosted last year's draft from home, but he'll be on hand for this year's event, which will incorporate all the health and safety protocols learned by the league over the past year as well as the city's best known locations along Lake Erie — FirstEnergy Stadium, home of the Browns, and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Before announcing picks, one of Goodell's duties on the first night is to open the draft, a moment followed by a chorus of loud, playful boos.



NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell talks about the Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year award during the NFL Honors ceremony as part of Super Bowl 55 in Tampa, Fla., in this Friday, Feb. 5, 2021, file photo.

This year, they'll be music to his ears.

The NFL feels confident it can hold a large-scale event after a successful run at this year's Super Bowl in Tampa, Florida. And, given the events of the past year, the league feels this draft can have an even deeper meaning than just teams picking new players.

"The draft is every year about hope. It's about fans having hope with new players, clubs having hope," said O'Reilly,

Vice President, Club Business & League Events. "The weather turning in parts of the country to spring, and the hope that comes with that." But this year, probably more than ever, is about coming together and signaling a brighter future and communities being able to come together safely with the right protocols and pointing to what's ahead."

With health and safety guidelines changing almost daily, the league does not yet have an "exact" figure of how many fans will be allowed to attend the free, outdoor festivities associated with this year's draft, which coincides with the Browns' 75th anniversary season.

Masks will be required and provided, and the league will use many of the same health protocols implemented last season to accommodate "tens of thousands" of football fans.

"The general message is that certainly we want to

Associated Press

welcome fans, not only from Cleveland but outside as well," O'Reilly said.

The league is continuing to work with state and local officials on finalizing safety protocols, with a priority on social distancing of any non-vaccinated fans. Some vaccinated fans selected by the teams will be allowed near the stage area. Some of this year's top prospects and their families are in the process of being invited to Cleveland, where they'll have their own "living room" space as players are selected. And like last year, players taken in the later rounds will participate remotely from their homes around the country. The league received positive feedback on some elements from last year's virtual draft — players being shown on camera with their families, coaches and general managers working from home — and it intends to capture some of those intimate moments going forward.

With the lake serving as its backdrop, a large stage will serve as a hub for the draft's activities, which will include picks being introduced by some of the NFL's former and current stars. New on Day 3 will be teams announcing their own picks remotely. □

10,000 and counting: The 'Point God' shows no signs of age



Phoenix Suns guard Chris Paul (3) drives around Los Angeles Lakers guard Dennis Schroder (17) during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, March 21, 2021, in Phoenix.

Associated Press

By DAVID BRANDT

AP Sports Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — Chris Paul says he knows the secret for why he's still a domi-

nant NBA point guard at an age when most of his peers are getting into coaching or figuring out their next steps in life.

"I told the guys in the locker room I've got the easy job," Paul said grinning. "I just pass it to them."

The 35-year-old Paul continued adding to the resume of his Hall of Fame-worthy career on Sunday night, passing 10,000 assists in the Phoenix Suns' 111-94 victory over the Los Angeles Lakers.

The 11-time All-Star hit 10,000 in spectacular fashion, throwing a perfect alley-oop pass to Deandre Ayton, who was streaking down the lane and finished with a powerful two-handed jam. Paul finished with a triple-double on Sunday, contributing 11 points, 13 assists and 10

rebounds.

Paul is just the sixth player in NBA history to reach the 10,000-assist milestone along with John Stockton, Jason Kidd, Steve Nash, Mark Jackson and Magic Johnson. At his current rate, Paul will pass Johnson this season and might catch Jackson and Nash.

"I just enjoy watching him get these achievements along the way," Suns coach Monty Williams said. "It's amazing. I remember when he was in college at Wake Forest and no one could see this on the horizon. It comes down to a lot of hard work, sacrifice, an unreal family that he comes from and a

dedication to the game." Williams and Paul have a unique relationship, operating almost as equals instead of the usual coach-player dynamic. The two have known each other for years and Williams was Paul's coach in New Orleans a decade ago. Now they're reunited and Williams is proud to call Paul a friend. Later Williams added: "When we're done with this I'm going to be checking up on his kids when they're getting 10,000 assists when they're in the league. I think it's a cool thing to have players you're close to, but also that you can coach and push." □